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XVI.—POSSIBLE EVIDENCE FOR THE DATE OF *TAMBURLAINE*

The first extant edition of *Tamburlaine* bears the date of 1590, but we have evidence of its existence as early as 1588 in the well known reference to "that atheist Tamburlan" found in the address *To the Gentlemen Readers*, which forms the introduction to Greene's *Perimedes the Blacke-Smith*.¹ Many authorities give 1587 as the date of the play, but there is no direct evidence for it. The date of the first appearance of *Tamburlaine* on the stage is of such importance in the history of the English drama that any evidence bearing upon the matter, however slight or however doubtful, should be brought to light for the consideration of students of Elizabethan literature. This is my apology for presenting a matter that seems to me somewhat doubtful; it may turn out to be of no value whatever as evidence; on the other hand, some one of keener insight may see in it strong corroboration of other evidence, or show it to be conclusive in itself.

Bullen, in his introduction to Marlowe's *Works*,² p. lxxv, calls attention to certain poems found at the end of Gabriel Harvey's *New Letter of Notable Contents*, 1593. These poems, four in number, are entitled, 1. Sonet. *Gorgon*, or the Wonderfull yeare; 2. A Stanza declarative; to the Louers of Admirable Workes; 3. The Writer's Postscript; or a frendly *Caueat* to the *Second Shakerly* of Powles; 4. Glosse.³ The first and fourth are each followed by an

¹ Greene's *Works*, Huth Library, vii, p. 8.

² A. H. Bullen, *The Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 3 vols., 1884-5.

³ I give titles and text of these poems as they are printed in Grosart's Edition of Harvey's *Works* (Huth Library), I, pp. 295-7.

envoy of two lines. Bullen prints the first, third, and fourth. He points out that the meaning of the first and third "plainly is—'Marlowe is dead; it remains to muzzle Nashe,'" and that the fourth plainly indicates that Harvey thought Marlowe had died of the plague.⁴ Grosart, independently of Bullen, had discerned the meaning of the fourth; in the introduction to his edition of Harvey's works he quotes Bullen in full.⁵

We are concerned here chiefly with the first of these poems, but inasmuch as the second, in its last line, is connected with the first, both are reprinted.

SONET

Gorgon, or the Wonderfull yeare.

*St. Fame dispos'd to cunnycatch the world,
Vprear'd a wonderment of Eighty Eight:
The Earth, addreading to be ouerwhurld,
What now auailles, quoth She, my ballance weight?
The Circle smyl'd to see the Center feare:
The wonder was, no wonder fell that yeare.*

*Wonders enhaunse their powre in numbers odd:
The fatall yeare of yeares is Ninety Three;
Parma hath kist; De-maine entreates the rodd:
Warre wondreth, Peace and Spaine in Fraunce to see.
Braue Eckenberg, the dowty Bassa shames:
The Christian Neptune Turkish Vulcane tames.*

*Nauarre wooes Roome: Charlmaine giues Guise the Phy:
Weepe Powles, thy Tamberlaine voutsafes to dye.*

L'enuoy

*The hugest miracle remaines behinde,
The second Shakerly Rash-swash to binde.*

⁴ Harvey's *New Letter* is dated September 16, 1593; Marlowe was buried June 1 of that year.

⁵ Vol. III, Intro., pp. xii-xvi. McKerrow seems to have overlooked Bullen's interpretation of the poems. See *Works of Thomas Nashe*, v, p. 102.

A Stanza declarative: to the Louers of Admirable Workes

*Pleased it hath a Gentlewoman rare,
 With Phenix quill in diamont hand of Art,
 To muzzle the redoubtable Bull-bare,
 And play the galiard Championesses part.
 Though miracles surcease, yet wonder see
 The mightiest miracle of Ninety Three.
 Vis consilij expers mole ruit sua.*

A few notes are necessary to make plainer the meaning of certain parts of these poems. The "hugest miracle" mentioned in the Envoy (i. e., the muzzling of Nashe) is to be worked by the "Gentlewoman rare" of the *Stanza declarative*,⁶ where it becomes "The mightiest miracle of Ninety Three." Comment upon the "wonders" mentioned in the second part of the sonnet forms part of the "notable contents" of the *New Letter*.⁷ The implication of the last line of the sonnet is that the death of Marlowe is the greatest wonder of Ninety Three. In the first line of the sonnet, "St. Fame" is in imitation and in ridicule of Nashe's use of the appellation in *The Epistle to the Reader* prefixed to *Strange News of the Intercepting Certain Letters*, 1592.⁸

With these preliminary considerations, we can now approach the question suggested by the expression in the

⁶ Harvey in the *New Letter* praises this anonymous lady and her writings in the most extravagant terms. Cf. *Works*, I, pp. 276-284. For Grosart's discussion of the question of her identity, see *Works*, III, Introd., pp. xxiii-xxiv, also McKerrow, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, v, pp. 89-90.

⁷ *Works*, I, pp. 260-265.

⁸ "Heere lies my hatte, and there my cloake, to which I resemble my two Epistles, being the vpper garments of my booke, as the other of my body: Saint Fame for mee, and thus I runne vpon him" (Nashe's *Works*, I, p. 263). Harvey never tires of making fun of this, sometimes using St. Fame as a nickname for Nashe, who refers to the fact in *Have with you to Saffron Walden*, 1596. Cf. Nashe's *Works*, III, pp. 52, 53.

second line of the sonnet, "a wonderment of Eighty Eight." What was this wonderment of '88?⁹ The first part of the sonnet seems to tell us this about it: Fame, disposed to fool the world, proclaimed the coming of a great wonder in 1588 (that great year of wonders). The Earth is in great dread that this wonder may upset her balance, but the Sun in his course remains serene. The only wonder that "fell" was the fact that nothing wonderful followed Fame's terrifying report. The second part of the sonnet says that greater wonders fell in '93 than in '88 and enumerates five. The first line of the final couplet mentions two more, and the last line announces the greatest wonder of all, the death of Marlowe ("Tamberlaine voutsafes to dye").

It is important to note that Marlowe is here called 'Tamberlaine.' This is in accord with the epithets and expressions used in the "Postscript" and the "Glosse,"—"Sir Rodomont," "Gargantua minde," "Scanderbeg,"¹⁰ "sky-surmounting breath," "breath that taught the Tempany to swell," "hawty man," "gloriously insults," "tamberlaine contempt," "toade Conceit," "Bull-beggar," "He that nor feared God, nor dreaded Diu'll, Nor ought admired, but his wondrous selfe." In such language does Harvey express his contempt for "Atheist Tamburlan" Marlowe and ridicule the pretensions of the dramatist and his play. And the same contempt and ridicule is expressed in the last line of the 'Sonet,' "Weepe Powles thy Tam-

⁹ The modern reader will inevitably think of the Spanish Armada and its defeat, and there is a possibility that this is the right interpretation of the allusion. The present article presents evidence for a different interpretation. See further, p. 443.

¹⁰ There is a similar association of Scanderbeg and Tamberlaine in Randolph's *Hey for Honesty* (1651), III, i, 21: "And I will be the Scanderbeg of the company The very Tamberlaine of this ragged rout." See N. E. D., s. v. *Scanderbeg*.

berlaine voutsafes to dye." Now the title and the first part of the 'Sonet' hold *something* up to ridicule, some "wonderment" that was to astound the world, something as terrible as Gorgon. Is it not reasonable to infer that this is the same thing as that referred to in the last line of the sonnet, namely *Tamburlaine*? Is not such an inference almost inevitable? Our conclusion then is that the "wonderment of Eighty Eight" alluded to in the second line of the sonnet is the play *Tamburlaine*, and, consequently, that 1588 is the date of the first appearance of *Tamburlaine* upon the stage.

Evidence in support of this interpretation is afforded by a poem of Harvey's added to *Pierce's Supererogation*,¹¹ which was evidently written just before the *New Letter*.¹²

An other occasionall admonition.

*Fame rows'd herselfe, and gan to swash about:
 Boyes swarm'd: youthes throng'd: bloudes swore:
 brutes rear'd the howt:
 Her meritorious work, a Wonderclowte;
 Did euer Fame so brauely play the Lowte?
 I chaunc'd vpon the Ryme: and wondred much
 What courage of the world, or Mister wight
 Durst terrible S. Fame so rashly tuch
 Or her redoutable Bull-begging knight.
 Incontinent I heard a piercing voyce,
 Not Ecchos voyce, but shriller then a Larke:
 Sith Destiny allottes no wiser choyce,
 Pastime appose the Pickle-herring clarke.
 Quiet thy rage, Imperious Swish-swash:
 Or Wo be to thy horrible trish-trash.
 Est benè, non potuit dicere: dixit Erit.¹³*

¹¹ Harvey's *Works*, II, p. 339.

¹² McKerrow, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, v, p. 103. The latest date in *Pierce's Supererogation* is August 3, 1593; the *New Letter* is dated September 16, 1593.

¹³ Nashe himself associates this poem with the *Gorgon* poems in the following passage from *Have with you to Saffron Walden*: "his

There is some obscurity in this piece, but it is plain that it refers to Nashe from "S. Fame" in line 8 and "her redoubtable Bull-begging knight" in line 9. The first four lines plainly refer to the conclusion of the *Epistle to the Reader* of Nashe's *Strange News*, already quoted;¹⁴ they ridicule Nashe's pretension to fame and belittle his work. Now, if we compare these lines with the first six lines of *Gorgon*, we find points of resemblance in general thought and phraseology. In each *Fame* raises much ado about something (in the *Admonition* a "worke") that is to be a wonder (*Gorgon*, "wonderment" "wonder"); in each the expected wonder turns out to be a ridiculous failure (*Gorgon*, "no wonder fell," *Admonition*, "a wonderclowte"). There can be no doubt that in the *Admonition* a work of Nashe's is referred to; we may be sure, then, that in *Gorgon* some work is referred to. The *Admonition* plainly ridicules Nashe and one of his works, *Strange News*; *Gorgon* just as plainly ridicules Marlowe and *Tamburlaine*. We have noted above the parallels between the openings of both pieces in the thought and expression; it seems inevitable that this parallelism should indicate parallelism of the works ridiculed, in the *Admonition*, *Strange News*, in *Gorgon*, *Tamburlaine*, the "wonderment of Eighty Eight."

In the light of the first four lines of the *Admonition*,

occasionall admonitionatiue Sonnet, his *Apostrophe Sonnett*, and *tinie titmouse Lenuoy*, like a welt at the edge of a garment, his *goggle-eyed Sonnet of Gorgon* and the *wonderfull yeare*, and another *Lenuoy* for the chape of it, his *Stanza declaratiue*, *Writers post-script* in meeter, his *Knitting up Cloase* and a *third Lenuoy*" (McKerrow, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, III, p. 133).

¹⁴ See p. 438, note 8. *Pierce's Supererogation* is Harvey's reply to Nashe's *Strange News*, in which "St. Fame" first appears. One of the sub-titles to *Pierce's Supererogation* is *A Preparative to certaine larger Discourses, intituled Nashe's S. Fame*.

the first six lines of *Gorgon* might be interpreted as referring to some work of Nashe's of the year 1588. Nashe's first work, *The Anatomie of Absurditie*, was entered in the *Stationers' Register* September 19, 1588; it was published in 1589; but there is no evidence that Harvey knew of its existence. The fact is well stated by McKerrow: ¹⁵ "It [*Anatomie of Absurditie*] seems to have dropped out of sight immediately upon publication, and neither Nashe himself, save, as already mentioned, in the *Preface to Menaphon*, nor Gabriel Harvey ever alludes to it. I can only suppose that Harvey had never seen it—though he must have seen Nashe's own reference to it—for, had he done so, he would surely have found in it something upon which to comment." There is no evidence for dating any other work of Nashe's earlier than 1589. Again, these first six lines of *Gorgon* might be interpreted as referring to Nashe's *Epistle to the Gentlemen Readers*, which forms the introduction to Greene's *Menaphon*. Nashe's high commendation of Greene's works in general and of *Menaphon* in particular might well be described as "proclaiming a wonderment," and Harvey's bitter enmity towards Greene would account for the contempt and ridicule expressed in line 6 of *Gorgon*.¹⁶ But there is no evidence that *Menaphon* was published before 1589. It is to be noted further that any interpretation that makes the first six lines refer to a work of Nashe sadly weakens the unity of the sonnet and fails to give any significance to the title.

The interpretation that is here maintained assumes that some specific thing (*Tamburlaine*) is alluded to in the

¹⁵ *Works of Thomas Nashe*, iv, p. 2.

¹⁶ We know, further, that Gabriel Harvey's brother Richard in his *Lamb of God* (published 1590) had attacked Nashe for presuming to pass judgment on contemporary writers. See McKerrow, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, v, pp. 75-6.

expression "a wonderment of Eighty Eight," and the evidence is strong that this specific thing is *Tamburlaine*; but it might, perhaps, be contended that such an assumption is unwarranted and unnecessary. In that case other interpretations, less specific in detail, might be suggested.

1. The wonders of '88 are as nothing compared with the wonders of '93; the greatest wonder of '93 is Marlowe's death. 2. Fear of the Spanish Armada terrified us, but it proved to be no wonder; the events of '93 are real and some of them very strange, but none so strange as the death of Marlowe. 3. Marlowe's fame is a wonder of '88, that is, it turns out to be false; his death, like the great events of '93 (some of them strange), is a strange reality. These interpretations are suggested not because it is believed that any one of them is as probable as the one here maintained, but rather to suggest the point wherein may lie a weakness of that interpretation. For if it can be proved that "a wonderment of Eighty Eight" does not allude to any specific thing, then it cannot allude to *Tamburlaine*.

It is not to be supposed that all the possibilities of interpretation have been exhausted here. Some one more deeply read in the controversy between Nashe and Harvey may find an interpretation that fits better all the words and acts of that notorious quarrel, an interpretation that may preclude all possibility of reference to the date of *Tamburlaine*. In the meantime this paper will have accomplished its purpose if it calls the attention of students of Elizabethan dramatic history to the possibility (or probability) of evidence for that date in this poem of Harvey's.

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